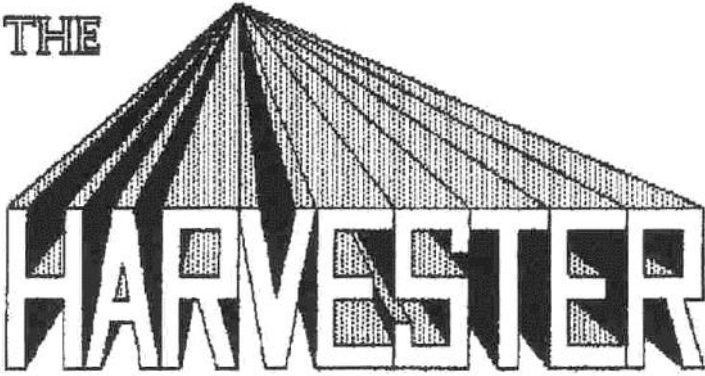


THE



"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)

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THE RAPTURE?

The English word "rapture" denotes a transporting from a lower to a higher level. As it relates to spiritual matters, the word in recent years has often been used incorrectly to describe an ascension of the righteous into heaven for a temporary and limited time and to later descend and compose a kingdom of God on earth intended to exist a thousand years.

This teaching was unknown until Morgan Edwards (1722-1795 from Wales) and John Nelson Darby (1800-1882 from England), both well known and

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influential church leaders, promoted this and related doctrines. In more recent years this teaching has been forwarded by writers such as Hal Lindsey (*The Late, Great Planet Earth*) and Tim LaHaye (*Left Behind*) and adopted by many well known, present-day religious leaders. Although this teaching originated in recent times and is contrary to that found in the Bible, it has been widely accepted by many denominations.

Teachings related to "the rapture," anti-christ, tribulation, coming of the earthly kingdom, and the thousand year reign of Christ result from a mixture of unrelated Biblical passages, many which were prophecies fulfilled centuries ago and are not yet future. These teachings, however, are taught as applying to the end-time and are yet to come.

Although there are some differences in opinion, the basic teaching is that at a certain, unknown time a "rapture" (catching away of God's people) will occur and a seven year period of tribulation will take place on earth, at which time the anti-christ will appear. The ones "raptured" will return with the true Christ (Jesus) Who is to establish His earthly kingdom and reign in triumph for a thousand years. Each of these conclusions is in direct contradiction to what the Bible actually teaches. We will examine them one-by-one.

First let us consider the rapture. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 does indeed teach that the redeemed in Christ "*shall be caught up together... to meet the Lord in the air.*" But this is at the end of time and not before some previous "rapture" which supposedly occurred a thousand

years earlier. Paul further wrote, "*and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" There will be no return to the earth. Daniel 9:24-27 beautifully predicts a seven year period at the conclusion of 483 years. This seven years was to be divided into two periods of 3½ years each: the first in which Jesus was to teach to the Jews and the second in which the Gentiles were to be brought into God's kingdom (Romans 1:16, Acts 10). In the midst of these two 3½ year periods "*shall Messiah be cut off*" (Jesus crucified). This occurred in 30 A.D. and in no way applies to something yet future. The same verse (26) foretells the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., forty years after the crucifixion of Jesus. To apply this passage to a time of a yet-to-come "rapture" is to terribly twist the Scriptures.

Anti-christ is found in four passages (1 John 2:18 and 22, 1 John 4:3, and 2 John 7). In 1 John 4:3 it is plainly stated that the "*spirit of anti-christ*" is "*every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,*" not someone who is yet to appear. Many have already filled that role: the Jews in general, those who compose Islam (the Moslems), the Hindus, and all atheists. John continued in the same verse, "*Even now already is it in the world.*" Anti-christ was present in John's day almost two thousand years ago and is not some evil individual yet to come.

Mr. Darby and present-day proponents of these teachings make a distinction between the kingdom and the church. They teach that Christ established His church, but He is yet to establish His kingdom. In this they are sadly mistaken, for numerous passages show Christ's kingdom to

have been established in Acts 2 and to have existed in the First Century: Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus taught that the coming of the kingdom was imminent. Luke 9:27, "But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." First Century Christians were in the kingdom. Colossians 1:13, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Revelation 1:9, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Neither the Colossians nor John could have been in something which did not exist! Christ's kingdom existed in the First Century and is not yet future. Jesus equates the kingdom and the church as being the same in Matthew 16:18-19, while Acts 2:47 states that those who were being saved were "added to the church."

The thousand years of Satan's being bound (Revelation 20:2,3,5) refers to a long period of time at which the Bible (God's word) was to be respected and followed by His people. That period was to be fulfilled when God's word would appear to lose its power because of increasing rejection of God's word - a situation which we are presently experiencing. Following the invention of movable type and the modern printing press (Johannes Gutenberg, 1450), the gospel message became available to the masses rather than a select few. This paved the way for widespread knowledge of God's word and greater expansion of

His true church. This continued most favorably for several centuries until more recent and growing disregard of the Bible and drastic increase of immorality. This is not referring to an exact thousand years, as indicated by reference in the same setting "*the bottomless pit*" and a "*great chain*" with which Satan was to be "*bound.*" There is, of course, no literal "*bottomless pit*" nor a literal "*chain*" which could bind a spirit being such as Satan. This is figurative, suggestive language as is the "*thousand years.*" This term is used in many other passages to denote extent and something unlimited. Psalms 50:10 refers to God as possessing "*the cattle upon a thousand hills.*" Does this not include those cattle upon the hills above the number thousand? Upon departing to be the wife of Isaac, Rebekah was encouraged by her family, "*Be thou the mother of thousands of millions*" (Gen. 24:60). Surely this is understood to be symbolic rather than actual. Revelation 5:11 is not limiting the number of angels when it writes of them being "*ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.*" No literal thousand is intended in such passages, simply suggestion of a long period of time.

Examining these several passages in their own context presents a beautiful understanding of God's marvelous truths. To misapply them and put them in an improper setting, however, distorts the truth, promotes lack of proper understanding, and has led many into error. What could please Satan more than to have God's word so twisted that honest souls should be thus led astray?

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: What does God's grace mean to Christians?

ANSWER: We are told that we are saved by grace through faith.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.
(Eph. 2:8-10)

Grace is God's favor or benevolent regard that He shows to mankind. This passage says our salvation is a gift of God given by grace. Sometimes we say that grace is the unmerited favor of God. That means that we didn't earn it, but God gave it anyway. He saved us by His grace based upon our faith in Him and His Son Jesus Christ. The works that the apostle Paul is referring to here are likely circumcision and performing the required actions under the Law of Moses. The Judaizing teachers wanted people to follow the Law; many who followed the Law were proud of their accomplishments and expected the favor of God. But the apostle Paul here states that salvation is not based upon works lest anyone should boast. Salvation is a gift from God through our faith. Even though

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we are not saved by good works, God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. In other words, God expects those He saves to walk in good works. God does not save people so that they would be devoid of good works or that they would perform evil works.

Since we are saved by grace, can we continue to live in sin?

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:1-4)

When a believer is baptized, the baptism symbolizes a death, burial and resurrection--the same as when Jesus died on the cross, was buried in the tomb, and was resurrected the third day. The believer therefore dies to sin; how can they live any longer in it? And just as Jesus was resurrected and is with the Father in heaven, the believer also rises out of baptism to walk in newness of life, a life where they do not live in sin any longer. Some were apparently saying that they could continue in sin so that God's grace would abound towards them. But the apostle Paul here says "Certainly not!"

So what does God's grace teach us?

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us

that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; (Tit. 2:11-12)

Do you think that God's grace teaches you anything? God's wonderful unmerited favor towards you should motivate you to give up all ungodliness and worldly lusts in your life. How can you continue to live ungodly when God has shown such love to you? If you continued ungodly living, you would be most ungrateful to Him. Instead, God's grace should motivate you to live a sober, righteous and godly life. That is how God wants you to live. Why would you want to live any differently when you experience the great love that He has for you? *"We love Him because He first loved us."* (1 Joh. 4:19)

Do you love God and appreciate His grace to you? Show it by your actions.

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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. How old was Noah when the flood came?
2. To what tribe did Samson belong?
3. Which king had the longest reign over the kingdom of Israel?
4. After Pilate found no guilt in Christ, for what reason did the Jews say that Jesus should die?
5. On which island did Paul preach on his first missionary journey?